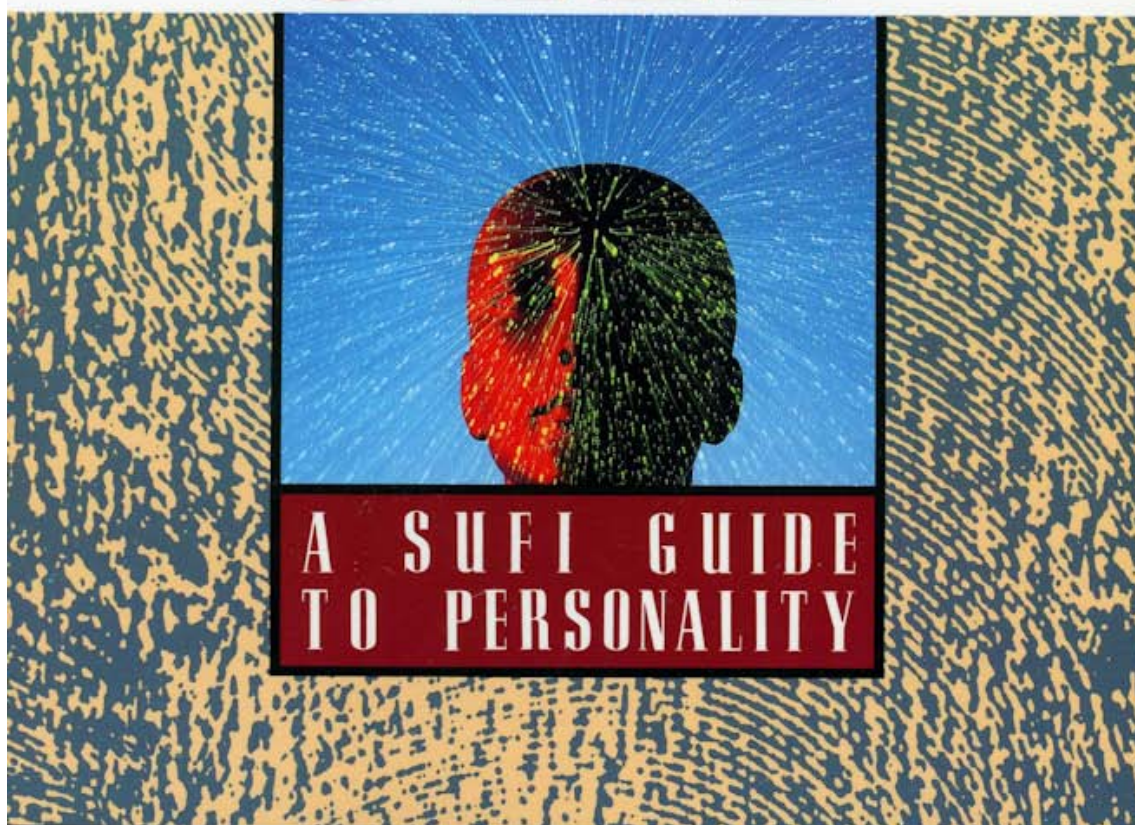


T H E

JOURNEY OF THE SELF



A SUFI GUIDE
TO PERSONALITY

SHAYKH FADHLALLA HAERI



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Book Description

This groundbreaking and seminal work is the first to travel into the very center of that uncharted meeting-place of science and spirituality. It presents for the Western reader a concept of the self from the Islamic view, the same concept as revealed in the teachings of several world religions, in particular the Judeo-Christian traditions.

It provides a genuine spiritual psychology rooted in a profound understanding of the mystery of the human self.

“It takes a rare author to write a book like this. Shaykh Fadhlalla is a man who is completely at home in the East and the West. He is a scholar and an effective and practical Sufi teacher, an international businessman and also an international philanthropist.”

– From the Foreword by Robert Frager

About Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri

Acknowledged as a master of self-knowledge and a spiritual philosopher, Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri's role as a teacher grew naturally out of his own quest for self-fulfillment.

He travelled extensively on a spiritual quest which led to his eventual rediscovery of the pure and original Islamic heritage of his birth, and the discovery of the truth that reconciles the past with the present, the East with the West, the worldly with the spiritual – a link between the ancient wisdom teachings and our present time.

A descendant of five generations of well-known and revered spiritual leaders, Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri has taught students throughout the world for over 30 years. A prolific author of more than thirty books relating to the universal principles of Islam, the Qur'an, and its core purpose of enlightenment, he is a gifted exponent of how the self relates to the soul, humankind's link with the Divine, and how consciousness can be groomed to reflect our higher nature.

The unifying scope of his perspective emphasizes practical, actionable knowledge that leads to self-transformation, and provides a natural bridge between seemingly different Eastern and Western approaches to spirituality, as well as offering a common ground of higher knowledge for various religions, sects and secular outlooks.

Acknowledgements

I am indebted to Allah's all-encompassing mercy, which has made us yearn for the path of true bliss through submission and surrender. I thank Allah for all the means and the processes of learning and experiencing along the path of love. I thank the many masters and teachers who have looked upon me kindly and affectionately. I thank Allah for the sincere friends, family and helpers who have made this book possible by their devotion, loyalty and tireless hours of editorial contribution. Those who have helped me are so many that I cannot mention them all. Batul Haeri worked continually on the manuscript with me for four years and without her, this book would not have been produced. I also wish to acknowledge Muna H. Bilgrami, Aga Abbas Bilgrami, Aga Haj Muhammad Ibrahim, Haj Mustafa, Jamila Kabira, Haj Ahmad, Rifat Nafisa, Dr Aliya and Maryam for their editorial participation, and Dr Stan Gooch and Christopher Flint for editing the text. Finally, special gratitude is expressed to Dr Robert Frager, who encouraged me in this endeavor and at whose center the first public talk on this subject was given. I am especially grateful to him for his contribution of the foreword to this book.

Foreword

There is a great spiritual hunger today. Many people have found that their real spiritual needs and deep inner questions have not been met by conventional religious writings or institutions. Many have looked in vain to psychology to fill the functions religion used to provide. *The Journey of the Self* provides a genuine spiritual psychology that speaks directly to this spiritual hunger. It is a psychology that is rooted in an understanding of the human soul, and the relation of the soul to the rest of the psyche. It is a psychology of self-knowledge, grounded in a practical understanding of the elements of the inner spiritual journey, and grounded also in the knowledge of Reality that is behind the world as we usually know it.

This is a very special book. It introduces an old and complex psychology taken from a variety of Islamic and Sufi sources. Much of this material has never been translated before, relatively unknown even in the Middle East. *The Journey of the Self* is of real use for both practicing Sufis and others interested in spiritual psychology.

Among men and women of faith, there has been serious doubt concerning the role of Western psychology for anyone with religious or mystical convictions. Traditional study of Western academic psychology often leads to a loss of faith, among both Western and Eastern students. This is the result of an unconscious acceptance of the unspoken tenets of Western psychology, which include positivism, materialism and a strong negative bias concerning religious and spiritual experience.

The antidote to this is the development of an alternative model of human nature, the development of a spiritual psychology. Any genuine spiritual psychology must proceed from a set of basic assumptions that are fundamentally different from those of traditional Western psychology. Some of these assumptions include the following:

1. Human experience includes both the sacred and the secular. Any spiritual (or full) psychology must deal with both. This also means that any spiritual psychology must deal with the relation of

the individual with the Divine, with the experience of Reality that is so frequently described in the world's mystical traditions.

2. The soul or deep self is an inner mystery within each of us, and also is part of the very essence of what it is to be human. Thus, the mystical quest can be understood as an essential aspect of real human development. One of the central tasks of any spiritual psychology is to study the soul and its relation with the rest of the psyche.

3. There are various possible states of human consciousness. Waking consciousness is only one type, and other states, such as mystical states, have their own special validity. Therefore, to base a psychology on only the limited experience of 'average' people during waking is to limit drastically the range of psychology.

4. The literature of mysticism frequently describes a kind of radical self-transformation. The concept of major, qualitative change during adulthood has not been examined in Western psychology, except for negative instances, such as psychosis. From the point of view of spiritual psychology, this self-transformation is an integral part of healthy adult development, fundamental in the integration of the soul with the personality.

The Journey of the Self provides a marvelous example of spiritual psychology, and reveals an understanding of the human psyche which is rooted in faith and spiritual practice. It also provides a complex model of human nature into which we can fit various concepts and theories from academic Western psychology. This book provides the best introduction I know of to this kind of model.

I have been particularly impressed by the relationship explicated between the development of the human soul and the development of the cosmos. This dramatically demonstrates that ancient spiritual wisdom can be shown to be completely compatible with the most modern scientific theories and cosmology. In addition, a wonderful combination of spirituality and practicality has been woven throughout this volume.

It takes a rare author to write a book like this. Shaykh Fadhlalla is a man who is completely at home in the East and the West. He is a scholar and an effective and practical Sufi teacher, an international businessman and also an international philanthropist.

I had the pleasure of serving as Shaykh Fadhlalla's host several years ago, when he presented a talk to a gathering here in Redwood City, California. The talk was devoted to the model of spiritual psychology that is detailed in this book. The audience included many psychologists and therapists who were fascinated by the talk. I was deeply impressed with Shaykh Fadhlalla's humor and sensitivity, and by his familiarity with the West and all the problems of seriously pursuing a spiritual discipline in the midst of Western culture. Our people here immediately responded to him and to his talk.

We are reminded in this book again and again how much we can learn from the wisdom of the Islamic teachings and the Sufi tradition. After all, over many centuries, Sufi shaykhs have served not only as spiritual guides but also as therapists and family counselors for their dervishes. There is much more 'clinical' wisdom and experience to be found in the Sufi and Islamic traditions than in the brief history of Western psychotherapy.

We are invited to self-understanding in this book, to psychology and spiritual self-knowledge. Not only are we invited, we are given examples and concrete help in making our way toward that goal.

Robert Frager, Ph.D

Founder, Institute for Transpersonal Psychology

Introduction

This book is an attempt to present the Western reader with a basic Islamic conception of the self. It is a concept that can be found within the revealed spiritual teachings of several world religions and, in particular, the Judaic, Christian and Islamic traditions. The knowledge and science of the self exists in the Islamic tradition in greater clarity and applicability because its teachings are more recent and have not been distorted, and they continue to be practiced up to the present day.

The basis of this knowledge of the self is that all humanity is one in its essence and origin. There is a primal or basic self which is the same in all human beings. We may differ biologically but the root of our motivations in life is similar. This model of the one adamic self is the pillar of all Islamic teachings and is to be found in the Qur'an, the Prophetic traditions and the teachings of the masters and saints.

We have all come from one source, and that one essential reality pervades all dual manifestations in existence. The physical world is based on duality, and everything in nature is created in pairs of opposites. All experiences, events, causal relationships and mental and intellectual appreciation are based on experiencing those opposites. We seek to understand, balance and reconcile the experienced opposite forces, driven as we are by the awareness of the essential unity within. This inner drive is unconscious and lies beyond our intellect and reason. As full appreciation of the natural law of opposites and complementarity sets in, we move beyond intellect and reason to our original unitive state, which is innate in all of us.

Man has always been searching for a fundamental law of nature which underlies the great variety of natural phenomena. Classical physicists answered many of the physical observations through the Newtonian mechanistic model of the universe. With the development of subatomic physics as well as new advances in astrophysics, we find a disappearance of the old atomic building block. The quantum theory introduced the concept of the participation of the observer, thus making invalid the idea of an objective description of nature and the separation between the observer and the observed. It put an end to the deterministic law of nature and the absolute objectivity of

scientific experimentation. In atomic physics, one cannot talk about its nature without speaking about the observer and his position.

Modern physicists are viewing the universe more and more as a unified whole which is interconnected in subtle ways. The concept of unbroken wholeness and the interdependence of mind and matter are increasingly being discussed among scientists.

It is very interesting also, to reflect upon the fact that no longer can physics talk about space without talking about time. It is curious to think that atomic particles traveling at high speeds appear to have a longer lifespan, and that at high velocities size seems to shrink. The three-dimensional world which we experience seems like only an image or a shadow of the relativistic, four-dimensional, space-time world. Doesn't this coincide with the spiritual teachings that remind us that this world is only a shadow of reality? By focusing on the shadow and being absorbed in its motion, surely we miss the reality that is causing it. The practice of meditation and sublimation seems to produce an effect of diminishing and finally disappearance of all experiential entities. This vanishing of space brings about the disappearance of time.

The practice is that if the identifiable self – the subjective you and I – is taken away, the concept of time and space will also be sublimated. Then the original reality (of one self), which was there before, now remains without a shadow to veil it.

Nowadays contemporary physicists, as well as other scientists, are looking for an all-embracing order and unifying factor upon which physical reality is founded. More and more, cosmologists are faced with the questions of how, when and why did everything begin. There is a general consensus to answer the first two questions: 10 to 20 billion years ago the universe came into being from a non-bounded state; and, after its full expansion and the big crunch, will return once more to its original, non-bounded state. Within this cosmic overlapping a number of modes of thought and theories have been put forth, to varying degrees of accuracy, to describe it. But the ongoing pre-creational state, being non-space-time related, lies beyond the realm of contemporary science and verges on the mystical or religious type of belief or experience.

The third question, why was the universe created, also lies beyond the grasp of science. It was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad that the essence of all creation is the greatest hidden treasure, and that it loved to be known; so it created, in order that it might be known. The Islamic viewpoint is that man, being the highest of all creation, is able to qualify for that knowledge, otherwise he will remain chasing the shadow of the images within the limitation of time and space in this world, without ever achieving freedom, true contentment or satisfaction.

The path to this experiential awakening is by understanding, inner abandonment and purification. The science of the self is indispensable for the preparation of attaining inner freedom.

This life, then, is a training-ground for us to witness how perfect are the universal laws of nature which in fact drive us towards seeking that limitless source of unity. We are born with an inner tendency which constantly motivates us towards our unitive origins. Our purpose in this life is to discover and know the basic nature of the self and the spiritual foundation which underlies it. We will only attain contentment when our potential as a spiritual being is fulfilled. No matter what we do in this world, it will never be totally satisfying. In other words, no matter how hard we try to attain fulfillment, harmony and peace, in the physical, emotional or intellectual sense, we will never be satisfied.

Our conception of the self shows that life is a journey of unfolding discovery towards self-knowledge, and that knowledge begins with physical and material consciousness at birth and evolves into emotional, mental and intellectual consciousness, then culminates at maturity with higher spiritual consciousness, or pure awareness.

It is by reason of this progression that we try to obtain fulfillment, first by seeking contentment physically and materially, then emotionally, mentally and intellectually, and then spiritually; and ultimately, simply in pure contentment, which is contentment for and by itself.

Any activity that leads us towards realizing our inner potential and essential nature we will find to be nourishing, enriching and conducive to fulfillment; and any other activity will be palliative, detractive to growth, and even destructive.

According to our conception of the self, then, conditions of imbalance or disturbance in the self are symptoms of something that has gone wrong in the natural progression of self-unfoldment or because of our not moving forward along the intended journey of self-discovery.

From this point of view, many who are considered in need of care could be individuals who are highly sensitive and possess greater spiritual potential than others. They may be persons who primarily need spiritual remedies and should be treated and corrected in this way, because they find the physical world does not fully answer their questions or fill their needs.

Any suffering from the world, then, could be considered as a positive experience; for it is a reminder that one is misdirecting one's energies, and could lead one back to the intended path of self-knowledge. It is for one to take corrective action – not to disconnect from one's experiential wholeness by being given chemical pills or analysis, neither of which reaches the root of the problem – which is to discover the true nature of the self.

The fact that such a large percentage of the population is currently under care, especially in highly technologized societies, is itself a positive indication that there is hope for humanity. The remedy called for is based on self-knowledge rather than the symptomatically-oriented forms of treatment which are prevalent at this time. Many people, in fact, may only be helped if they are allowed to be taught to understand this basic conception of the self and to see it manifest and working in themselves. With understanding, guidance from an awakened teacher, and a sense of humor, many may be able to overcome most of the obstacles that cause confusion or depression and an inability to cope with the world.

In Chapter One we lay down stepping-stones from which we introduce our conception of the self. Our approach touches upon a progression of life experiences, beginning at birth. Questions are posed to ask what are the basic motivations underlying all creation that make us behave as we do, and what aspects in life are by their nature common to all of us.

Chapter Two discusses the nature and spectrum of the self. We define what is meant by the self, and put forth a description of its real and basic nature.

In Chapter Three we trace the journey of the self through its five phases of development in this life towards higher consciousness, and its return to its origin. This journey is based on a pattern that charts a parallel progression of the outer (biological) and inner (conscious) development of the human being. But although the focus is on the human being (the microcosm), the phases of development are echoed in the macrocosm of the universe. These phases are meant to be seen as a general description of the flow of human development and, as such, there will necessarily be some overlapping between phases. Aspects of earlier phases remain active to varying degrees of intensity throughout one's life, even as one progresses in the journey.

Phase One is the world of Absolute Unitive Reality. It is the realm of the absolute void – timeless, eternal, infinite, unmanifest. It is the world of pure consciousness, of reality before physical creation.

Creation begins with the transition to Phase Two, Inner Dependence. Conception, pregnancy, the cosmos unfolding – this phase outlines the earliest stages of creation. In Phase Three, that of Outer Dependence, creation explodes into a discernible universe, and this is reflected in the microcosm in the birth of the human being. Here, the newborn is totally dependent outwardly.

As Phase Three moves into Phase Four, there is a gradual shift from extreme outer dependence to Interdependence with other elements. It is this phase of Interdependence which charts our growth to full physical, emotional, intellectual and cognitive maturity, and there is the greatest level of outer activity and interrelationships. It is here that we introduce grids and models that will help us to understand the basic patterns and relationships in the macrocosm of creation and in the microcosm of human behavior.

In the transition from Phase Four to Phase Five (Inner Reliance), maturation as a rational being draws one away from the appetites and distractions of physical existence to an awakening of the inner life. In Phase Five, there is an increased awakening and reliance on inner experiences, and we can attain the highest possible station of fulfillment. While we are still live, we will always be to some degree interdependent upon other beings in this world. Movement towards the spiritual life does not imply renunciation of this world, nor is the physical world a mere illusion. Its very transience impels us to see beyond it. Our experience of the next consciousness (after death) is

determined by our actions and experiences in this life. In reality, the Fire of Hell and the Garden of Paradise are states of consciousness, so both can be experienced in this life before physical death. Finally, the journey in this life is completed with the return of the self to its origin.

The outline of the journey of the self in five phases has been synthesized by the author for illustration and analysis, whilst within the phases themselves teachings by other writers and masters have been included and quoted.

In Chapter Four we examine the major symptoms and conditions of the self as well as their root causes, and discuss the nature of their treatment and cure. Here we shall also examine the virtues of the self.

Finally, in Chapter Five, we illustrate the inherent unified nature of the self by examining situations that show how the self throughout its life manifests characteristics and tendencies towards its unific origin. The examples illustrate how the self is connected at all times to the unific factor that underlies it. By the variety of examples given, the reader will be able to see from personal experiences and observations the predominance of the unified nature of the self. No doubt the reader can add to our small sampling many more cases and observations.

Within this model of the self, aspects of ancient Eastern spiritual teachings as well as Middle Eastern religions or Western philosophies can be found to exist. Islam, being the primal adamic code, predates all of these teachings, although it was unveiled in its totality only fourteen centuries ago. Orientalists, for example, have referred to aspects of the Islamic teachings on the self as neoplatonic. The truth is that Plato's writings are an aspect of the adamic teachings and in themselves are incomplete.

One of the reasons that the Islamic cosmology of the self and higher consciousness is not more widely known in the West could lie in its multidimensional nature, and the difficulty of unraveling one strand from its total wholeness. The Qur'an, for example, talks about man's outer code of social responsibility and his path of inner purification in the same breath. It speaks about higher consciousness and Islamic law in parallel. It talks about this world and the next in complete harmony and relatedness. For a reader who has not accepted revealed laws in this

world, it will be a greater challenge to accept or understand the Qur'an as it relates to the self and higher awareness.

The reader needs to approach this work with an open heart and without prejudice in order to benefit. These teachings can only be useful if accepted and applied; they are of little benefit for purposes of discussion, debate or similar academic pursuits.

Our conception of the self is intended for use by the layman and expert alike, as a basic foundation or blueprint for any system of self-knowledge or the psychological sciences. Irrespective of whether or not one believes in or accepts the unific reality that underpins the self and all of creation, one will still find that this conception can be applied to any system as a blueprint that explains human behavior and provides for it remedies and cures.

The sole intention of our present work is to provide a basic model of the self, which others may then wish to take and develop further by building upon it. Usable and successful techniques that have been developed in the West over the past may be added and integrated. A review of contemporary theories and techniques can be made, and those parts which fit within this conception will be useful and will last, and those which do not fit within this conception will eventually be found not to stand the test of time and will be discarded. Others may wish to apply their knowledge and field experience to this blueprint of self-knowledge in order to develop it further towards greater applicability. This book is only a first step towards developing and evolving a comprehensive and pragmatic model of the self in this field.

Although we attempt in this work to describe all aspects of the self and its journey towards enlightenment, the achievement of this is rarely possible without a realized teacher. The enlightened person will guide others in a wise and inspired way towards the ultimate goal, whereas a treatise such as this is a mere description of the basic field of activity. In fact, a deep criticism of this work is that by our merely presenting it, it may lead the individual seeker to assume that the cure is in sight; however, having a simple, analytical knowledge of a situation is very different from actually arriving at the results.

So once the appropriate recipe for life is found, the next step is to be amongst the experts who have applied it and, thereby, have been transformed by it. There is a vast difference between reading a menu and deriving nourishment from a meal; but the sincere seeker of wisdom will end up by being amongst the wise.

Chapter 1: Stepping-Stones to Self-Knowledge

We must build a bridge if we are to reach the intended shore. In this first chapter, we will outline the assumptions and pose questions that will orient the reader to the knowledges of the self. Each stepping-stone on the way shares with the reader an aspect of the human situation as we observe it; that is, of the basic realities and facts of the life in which we find ourselves, of the personal, social and moral factors which influence us, and of the prime motives, basic needs and impulses of the self that drive us hither and thither.

The many stepping-stones of the human situation described in the following pages form a pathway which will give us access to an understanding of the self.

The Vortex of Creation

Humanity is caught in the dynamics of life. We are driven either to satisfy our desires and impulses – be they rational or irrational – or to avoid unpleasant disturbances and conflicts. At times, we are successful in this challenge, and at other times we fail.

It can be observed that we share a great many experiences in common, as well as many differences. We will look at how this situation arises. We will also consider the meaning of the one self, the drive for knowledge, and the quest for freedom when we know we are bound, and we will examine these points and many others so that we may attain a clear understanding of the dynamics of the self and its basic essence. For until the basic fundamental nature of all humanity is fully understood, there cannot be a proper understanding of individual or collective behavior.

The One Self

There is a primal or basic self – which can be described as patterns of expectations, desires, fears, needs and values – which is the same in all human beings. We may be different biologically and in our outer behavior, but the root of our motivations in life is the same. This model of the one adamic self is the pillar of all Islamic teachings and is to be found in the Qur'an, the Prophetic traditions and the teachings of the masters and saints.

The Qur'an says that you were created from one self. Each individual self has a higher nature and a lower nature. We function on a spectrum which at one end resembles the lowest of animalistic impulses and thoughtless responses, and at the other end, a sublime, patient, considerate and independent yet loving and compassionate nature. We can at times behave worse than the lowest of animals, and at other times with a selflessness and nobility that cannot be surpassed. Whether we reflect our higher self or our lower self, there remains within us an unchanging, steady state of the one self, which is the same foundation in each person. When we are least subject to the changeable impulses of the self, we gain greater access to that constant one self within.

The Many Profiles but One Face of Humanity

A great diversity in character traits can be observed within the one individual – childishness, innocence, aggression, domesticity, materialism, spirituality, adventurousness, reflectiveness, impulsiveness, and so on. All of these traits and many others are harbored within one bosom. Each individual being is like a new stream produced by fresh rain. Many such streams pour forth into the ocean of humanity from which they originated. Although individuals have their own unique characteristics, biologically and environmentally related, ultimately one unchanging essence underlies all the outer complexities and differences, especially amongst various societies and cultures, in humanity.

The Challenge of Opposites

From childbirth onwards we are exposed to the dynamic flux of opposites, and must make choices concerning them. Some will give us satisfaction and contentment, and others will cause us suffering and pain. We are constantly placed in this position of continually having to make choices, in order to allow for the growth of our faculty of reasoning.

Animals are not given this challenge. The cat, for example, does not have to cover itself with a blanket in order to keep itself warm in winter. We, on the other hand, must constantly strive to find the means of satisfying our basic needs of clothing, food and shelter, as well as an ever-growing number of other needs and desires.

The satisfaction of our needs, and the choices by which we attain that satisfaction, constitute our prime motivation. Together they spur the development of our faculty of reasoning and the understanding of cause and effect, and bring about our technological advancement. So nature, from the outset, drives us towards the development of our discriminatory capabilities through the necessity of having to make choices.

Wherever we look we are faced with opposites and we must make choices with regard to them.

One of the verses in the Qur'an describes the self as having been brought forth and, inspired, given the innate knowledge of what is virtuous and wholesome, and what is corrupt and decadent. The Qur'an indicates that the individual self is given the freedom to choose to follow the path of wholesomeness. The wise person actually has no choice but to accept the path of unity.

Attraction and Repulsion

The basic fundamental motivation behind all of our actions and behavior is based on either the power of attraction or the power of repulsion. At all times, we find that our actions are based on attracting what we perceive will bring about harmony and equilibrium, whilst repulsing whatever we perceive to be the cause of disharmony and disequilibrium.

This constant flux of attraction and repulsion, of push and pull, is the essential dynamism upon which everything in this existence depends and is balanced. Even at a cellular level, an amoeba will move toward nourishment and away from a toxic solution.

At the physical level, our biological survival depends on our ability to pull in fresh air and push out stale air, and the same dynamism holds true at the emotional, intellectual and higher levels. On the emotional and psychological levels, we desire peace and tranquility and repel anxiety and fear, whilst on the intellectual level we desire enlightenment through the attainment of knowledge and the repulsion of ignorance. Love and fear are two manifestations of the powers of attraction and repulsion. It is by love that we are propelled towards contentment and fulfillment and by fear that we avoid disturbances and undesirable things. The steady stream of life which,

propelled by attraction and repulsion, is constantly balanced between harmony and peace and conflict and opposition.

Pleasure and Pain

At all times, we want to increase our experience of pleasure and contentment, and, conversely, reduce our experience of suffering and pain. Are experiences of joy and pleasure in this life representative of what is possible in the next consciousness or the hereafter? These experiences seem to act as tiny windows or glimpses into the inner state of pure bliss in another consciousness or life, that will be ours if we are properly prepared for it.

The same applies to our experiences of pain and wretchedness. These too are samples of what may occur by our own misdeeds if we do not follow the intended course of submission, surrender and responsible freedom during the training stage of this life.

From this point of view, every instance of pleasure or pain motivates us to move along a path which ultimately leads to a state where only infinite joy and no sorrow exists! Is this not the state in which Adam was originally created? Is this not reaching back to the real root of the matter?

Change and Non-Change

We emanated originally from a permanent or unchanging state, that prior to the act of creation. Change begins to take place at the point of conception. At birth, a child finds anything that changes outwardly to be disagreeable. The emergence from the womb itself is disagreeably shocking – hence the cry of the newborn which helps it to adjust.

As the child grows, it begins to think of change as something that is possible instantaneously, and it wants its desires to be satisfied, at once. As one matures further, one realizes that outer satisfactions have no end and that the physical world offers little stability, whereas knowledge and wisdom are unending and provide a reliable, stable base. This process of awareness and change continues to the end of one's life, until the body is attracted back to its original source – the earth – and the self returns to its origin in an unknown dimension – the unseen.

The Quest for Freedom

Among the greatest dichotomies to which we are constantly exposed is our quest for freedom whilst simultaneously experiencing restriction. We know that whatever action we take, its outcome will be limited, be it in the sphere of material achievement, moral progress or any other arena. For example, although the athlete has the basic potential and relative freedom to achieve new levels or to set new records, his incremental achievement seems to get smaller with each successive attempt and appears to be approaching a point in which the upper limit cannot be stretched any further.

Whatever freedom an individual may think he has, it is still nevertheless bound within limits. Our life is confined within the limits of birth and death, and although we may enjoy a degree of flexibility, outer freedom is ultimately limited in this world.

Yet we are constantly seeking freedom by pushing to the furthest limits of our bounds. It is as though we are hearing an echo from deep within which reminds us of a boundless and limitless inner freedom which can only exist within our consciousness.

Freedom of No Choice

We are all bound by physically and materially limiting factors in this life. The human frame has its limiting capacities. Emotional and intellectual freedoms also have their limitations. Absolute freedom we all know is impossible, for even if we free our self from outer shocks and disturbances, we are not free from death. So how do we explain this drive towards freedom, and the underlying recognition and relativity of freedom? Also, how can we arrive at the knowledge and understanding of this ultimate freedom whilst being bound within the framework of human reference? Is this not the freedom of no choice? Is it not true that we are continually searching for absolute freedom?

To embark upon the voyage of discovery in an ocean with no boundaries, we need the most reliable and best-designed of vessels. Recognizing and knowing the limitations of our systems is the first step towards the journey of self-discovery. We have no choice but to seek ultimate freedom. This is only possible through self-awakening – from the limited to the limitless.

The Need for Security

As we have mentioned, we are all subject to opposites. We enjoy the experience of a jump or a free fall, but only if there is a secure base. We enjoy the dangers of a hunt – but only if there is a reliable home to which we may return, for hunting would be incomplete were it not for the base to which the prize could be brought back. Conversely, uninterrupted security would be unbearably dull. The security of a rock is not what we ultimately seek.

So at the physical level, we need the security of a healthy body, protective clothing and shelter. At the intellectual level, we need the security of knowledge. We need to be sure of the permanence of what we know. We want to be able to predict and be prepared. We shun disharmonious surprises. Even when we seek change, we wish to relate this change to a reliable base of known parameters.

Yet, even though we know full well that there is no absolute material or emotional security, we still strive after these unattainables. What is there within us that causes this paradox?

Basic Needs

At the outset of our journey in this life, we find that we share with our fellow human beings the desire for a sustained state of equilibrium – or as near to it as possible – in order to attain a state of contentment; and the basic needs of food, clothing and shelter have to be fulfilled before we can move on to attempt to satisfy our more subtle needs.

This is the reason why we are moved to sympathize with others who are afflicted with unfulfilled basic needs and the lack of basic essentials. This sympathy is a spontaneous acknowledgement and understanding of the basic position of discomfort or turmoil. This is why any appeal for aid to children or the aged, the helpless or the homeless, is generally responded to by every one of us. We all share this basic common denominator – there is no difference among us when it comes to the question of basic human needs, be they physical or emotional.

It can, therefore, be said that as long as there are people whose basic needs are not fulfilled, there will exist disequilibrium and what we often consider as injustice. As long as there is injustice,

there will be agitation and turmoil preventing the possibility of a lasting peace. So all the political and utopian cries for peace are empty rhetoric as long as basic needs remain unattainable to people.

The Hierarchy of Fulfillment

There are priorities regarding the fulfillment of needs. Potentially it is relatively simple to fulfill basic material or physical needs, because they are subject to causal relationships. Therefore, filling an empty stomach is easier than obtaining mental tranquility and mental equilibrium is easier to achieve than intellectual fulfillment. Thus, people possessing material power seem to be better fulfilled in physical ways, but they still lack contentment in other, less material areas. They cannot buy what is missing in a shop – and they cannot get someone else to produce it for them. Total fulfillment still remains elusive.

We often find that people who make remarkable progress in the need-fulfillment hierarchy reach a point of desperation which makes them seek other means to further their progress, such as drugs or alcohol. Of course, these do not bring the fulfillment that is so desperately sought. They can only bring a short-lived relief from the drive for inner peace (whether mental, intellectual or spiritual) and harmony. Eventually, these people will come to despise themselves, because alcohol, drugs, and other artificial means disengage the natural dynamic process and bring about distortions and complications in their quest along the path of fulfillment.

It is the subtlest and highest of needs, then, which is the most elusive to fulfill and the object of the search for all of humanity. What, one may ask, is this ultimate fulfillment that we are all seeking?

The Drive to Achieve and Succeed

We constantly create objectives and goals in order subsequently to achieve and neutralize those objectives. This is a typically hyperbolic or cyclical exercise in the process of experiencing life. These attainments are not just ends in themselves. For there is a tremendous dynamism in the process of achieving the goal, and the individual develops a wider and deeper sense of connection with the environment, the community and the world. When one takes into

consideration the whole of the environment, one is more likely to achieve and succeed, for he will have examined all the factors which interact upon the path towards the objective, and will have considered the peripheral and subtle elements that may impinge upon the target. The attainment of these considerations and viewpoints will no doubt bring about a sense of satisfaction and confidence, in addition to the actual achievement of the goal in question.

Therefore the achievement of goals also results in broadening one's vision and horizons. The closer one is connected to the dynamic interplay of the factors that surround one, the more likely one is to succeed in achieving the goals. This is why many of us are attracted to centers of decision-making and authority, to presidents and kings, for it enables us to anticipate the change of events in advance in order for us to adjust to the course of things in good time. Thus, it is useful for anyone setting up an enterprise to select partners who are connected with other networks – political, scientific, and so on that they may feed back into one's own system. In other words, the wider and more varied the individual's horizons and the quicker the input/output feedback, the more successful is that person in adjusting the direction of his efforts to achieve or alter selected targets.

Successes or achievements in themselves are only temporary resting places on the ever-spiraling stairway of human unfoldment. No sooner is one objective achieved than we set out again on the path in pursuit of yet another goal. It is a continual process in which we set up desires and then set about to satisfy them, and, by doing so, attain a state of neutrality which brings about harmony, equilibrium and peace of mind – which, together with neutrality, is what we all truly desire and love.

How, then, do we reconcile this paradox of love of achievement (i.e. the peace of mind attained by the satisfaction of desires) with the ever-continuing process of setting out yet again towards new goals and objectives? Why are we caught in this perpetual process of attaining peace, and then plunging once again into the unknown struggle?

A Prophetic tradition says that if you fill the biggest valleys in this world with gold and give them away, it will never satisfy the desires of any single man. So desires as such never end, nor will the continual struggle to attain them.

The Roots of Greed

Greed is often related to fear, instability and insecurity. If material accumulation and possessions could bring us security and happiness, then it would be only too easy to achieve happiness. Insecurity, however, can lead us to the discovery that physical or material possessions are not enough. This experience potentially could lead one towards progress and the discovery of an underlying inner security, which is the happiness we are truly seeking.

Are not greed and the material search, then, essentially perverted means of attempting to attain real security? Greed could be sublimated by our intellectual and experiential realization that no outer accumulation will ever satisfy us fully. On the other hand, knowledge and experience of the inner life, and awakening to the higher spiritual dimensions, can propel us towards the one secure foundation behind all creation.

So the roots of greed and the power it engenders could be directed towards a positive end, once we discover the futility of greed itself and the desirability of true security.

Peace

We are driven in all circumstances to seek the tranquility and equilibrium of peace. This is attained either in the form of static or motionless peace, such as in death or deep sleep, or in the dynamic peace of active life, and stability or equilibrium in changing situations. This stability or peace comes about by bringing together or connecting and linking unifying factors between diverse elements.

Peace comes about when agitations, desires and passions are calmed and settled, and a state of rest, equilibrium and contentment is attained. The body is biologically at peace when it is healthy and at war when it is fighting a virus. The intellect is at peace when it has attained a certain understanding or perception, and has overcome a challenge of uncertainty and confusion.

Therefore whenever our peace is disturbed for whatever reason, we instinctively strive to regain that state of equilibrium; this, then, is the basic human drive which operates at all levels,

physical, mental and intellectual, in all circumstances. One of the divine names of God is al-Salam, Peace.

Health and its Hierarchy

We need physical health in order to be aware of our body's need to attain equilibrium, so that the body and its mechanisms do not call our attention to it and distract us. Just as physical health means being in a state where there are no abnormal or disharmonious signals from the mind.

Generally, when we are in a state of disharmony or imbalance, an alarm goes off to call our attention to the problem in order that we may bring ourselves back to a state of contented harmony.

Once our body is in a satisfactory state, our attention goes towards mental health and well-being. The hierarchy of health moves from the physical to the mental and intellectual, and finally towards the higher and subtler spiritual realm. Though the relationships between these levels of health are strong, they are not easily definable.

In general, we seek steady overall health in order to move higher, into subtler degrees of awareness and well-being.

Man, the Unified Being

Every aspect of the human being and his behavior, his desires, drives, expectations, actions, all follow a unific pattern of harmony and interconnection. If one becomes aware of the unifying process, then one experiences gatheredness, connectedness and harmony. If one is not aware of the overall pattern of the unifying force, then one's behavior will be erratic and generally unstable. Invariably this undirected behavior veers towards the edge of the intended path, bringing about experiences of disharmony, affliction, suffering and pain. Once off the path, destruction will be the inevitable result.

The bitter experiences of instability, disharmony and suffering are in fact a blessing, and an aspect of divine love. These experiences should be seen as guardrails on a highway, which will serve to bring one back to the center of safety and equilibrium.

How else can the human being experience the opposites in this life unless he is actually subjected and exposed to them? So the human being experiences both the sweet and bitter, whilst an inner discriminative impulse within him recommends the sweet and repulses the bitter.

Man, then, already has nature's recommendation as to what to choose, but he must make the actual choice himself. The right choice will bring about the security of an original wholeness which is the hallmark of the unific, one absolute reality engulfing all manifest and non-manifest creation.

For the Love of Life

Even in adverse conditions, we hang on to life, the young and the old, rich and poor, ill and well. Indeed, the whole of humanity at all times and in all places desires to prolong life and to preserve it. Why do we do this? When we are unhappy or suffering in life, why do we wish to live long, even though we know that death is imminent? How can we reconcile these two opposite aspects, the certainty of death and the wish to avoid death?

One explanation of this paradox is that life on this earth has a purpose. Once that purpose is accomplished, the attitude toward death changes. The power of life is like that of light – its purpose is to enable us to witness and experience knowledge and enlightenment. Although enlightenment has a beginning, there seems to be no end to it. Like an airplane, once it is airborne, there seems to be no end to its possibilities. That is why no one with a sound mind will fritter life away.

Life's purpose is to rediscover our original unified nature. Whilst interacting in the transient world, the perfection and the beauty of this experience lies in our ability to fix or stop time. The urgency to discover the meaning of life is because of its slipping by.

All aspects of our basic nature relate to the condition of the primal adamic state, that is, to live in a true garden without concern or pressure of time – timeless bliss.

The Urge for Creativity

Our urge for creativity is similar in nature to our desire to proceed from the bounds of the known to the realm of the unknown. It is related to our intellectual and higher levels of expression.

If we ask a child or a simple minded person to create a painting, he or she will draw a house, a dog and a tree. The more evolved mind, however, rises beyond the limits of mere representation and thinks in terms of abstract ideas, beauty and other meaning. So creativity begins at the boundary where the world of the physical and the world of meaning meet, and moves beyond it.

We are characteristically drawn or driven by our creative urge, and it is in the creative act that we have the opportunity to exercise greater freedom than in other fields. Yet we find that we ourselves have been created without having been given a choice in the matter.

We are all the product of the natural creational process, and we too like to create. It is as though we are trying to participate in and echo the creational reality, or is it that we are trying to discover or follow the way of creation by imitating its method? Nature's beauty and creativity is boundless. Are we not trying to reflect the same truth of this endless beauty in our own creative expressions? One of the divine names of God is al-Jamal, The Beautiful. A Prophetic tradition says: Allah is beautiful and loves beauty.

The Drive for Knowledge

We generally associate fear, anxiety, enmity and distress with ignorance. Thus, we compare ignorance to darkness and knowledge to light. Essentially, we do not like darkness because it represents the unknown, and, as we have seen, we at all times wish to know. Our desire for knowledge is basic and elemental.

We want to know how to stop things which may harm, impoverish, deprive, or adversely affect us in any way. We equally want to know what enhances our fulfillment and well-being. We want

to know how to move smoothly and speedily from the unpleasant and undesirable to the pleasant and desirable, from disequilibrium to equilibrium and from disharmony to harmony. We want to know how to be integrated in our approach and direction to things, rather than be confused by opposites, multiple choice, dualities and other uncertainties. We want to know how to choose from the many paths the best, safest, easiest, fastest and the most direct and effective one. Basically, we fear uncertainty and love certainty and reliability.

However, while we are in search of certainty, the cloud of uncertainty hangs over our heads. For example, while we seek certainty in life, the uncertainty of death and what follows it constantly haunts us. Yet this continuous crisis situation is the main source of constant opportunity for the wise.

At all times, we are matching new information and facts with past experiences, in order to add new dimensions to the ever expanding network of perceptions and knowledge which we are building. Our drive to expand this network increases with the increase of our knowledge. It is a never ending process. Each new level, stratum or dimension of knowledge opens new vistas for further search and assimilation, and the whole process is absorbing and obsessive because of the connective, integrating and unifying characteristic of its very nature.

Ignorance has the opposite effect; it is sterile, disruptive and limiting. Since this is contrary to man's nature, he is repulsed by its oppressiveness and darkness, and attracted to knowledge and light because it is connective, expansive and unifying.

Two Types of Knowledge

There are two types of knowledge available to man. One type is based on facts and information, is related to existential realities and deals with causality and that which governs the manifested existence of the objective world. This type of knowledge has its root in physical or outer reality. Let us call it factual and objective.

The second type of knowledge is more complex and is of a more permanent nature. This type of knowledge relates to higher or inner awareness and reality. For example, humanity has always honored such values as courage, generosity and loyalty, and has always condemned their

opposites – cowardice, selfishness and disloyalty. We have valued wisdom, patience and forbearance and abhorred stupidity and impatience.

Therefore, this subtler or higher type of knowledge, which we may term as primal, fundamental, or inner knowledge, is an integral part of man's consciousness, and is more developed in such individuals as prophets, realized beings, gnostics and others who have gained greater access to that inner awareness and fulfillment. This knowledge has its root within the human heart, and access to it is available only as a result of the quest for and unfolding of our inner inherently noble essence.

This inner knowledge belongs to a subtle, multidimensional network which is stimulated by external facts and information, causing it to receive and evaluate this data then respond in the most appropriate manner. So the greater the development of our innate knowledge, the more will we be able appropriately to absorb, coordinate, relate and utilize the factual knowledge and external information which comes to us.

Both kinds of knowledge are essential and complementary for human evolvment – the outer knowledge reflecting upon the network of inner knowledge to bring about a state of stability, reliability and harmony – even though we may still be acting dynamically in this world.

Prophetic traditions emphasize that there are two kinds of knowledge or science – one to do with existential realities and another to do with the path of awakening. The first concerns facts and information about the physical world, whilst the second is to do with guidance and illumination of the unseen, and the spiritual world.

Society, Culture, and Character

The development of the human self and its purification is essential to the establishment and maintenance of culture and civilization. The building of a noble character and the acquisition of virtue are an integral part of the development and growth of individuals and societies. We can only survive, both as individuals and as a species, as a result of behavior that is based on such stable noble character and virtue.

Just as a family is composed of individual beings, a society comprises an amalgamation of family units and its strengths and weaknesses are a direct result of the quality and cohesiveness of its values and goals.

A review of the lifespan and success of various societies, cultures and nations shows that the more vigorously practiced are the higher values in a society, the stronger, healthier and more durable that society will be. We will invariably find that the society with the greatest strength is the one which most vigorously upholds the higher virtues, such as courage, generosity, loyalty, modesty, humility and honor. Conversely, whenever a society has become static and stops evolving, a state of decay sets in because the primal values have either been forgotten or at best only ritualistically observed.

The survival of a society in the long term, then, is dependent upon virtuous leadership and truly virtuous leadership is ultimately appropriate at all times and in all circumstances, for it can only result from such a developed character and awareness that transcends space and time.

Travel

Travel is always a reliable means of observing and acquiring knowledge of creation in this world.

There are two factors that give meaning to whatever we observe and experience during travel: one is change itself, and the other is the meaning of that change against a backdrop of reliable past knowledge. So there is outer movement and new experience, and there is also an inner, stable network of reference, against which the outer movement is measured and evaluated. What we are doing whenever we look at the customs and habits of different cultures is to try to discern the unifying factor behind the apparent outer differences. This is the true significance of traveling – we try to see the common denominator underlying apparent differences.

At first we may be confused, not understanding what we observe in a foreign culture. But when we relate this new observation to what we already know, this understanding connects the new information to existing past knowledge. The integration of new information brings fresh satisfaction and enrichment, unless we have simply shrugged it off and dismissed it with a value-

judgment such as calling a culture primitive or ignorant, for example, in order to discard the perplexing or confusing observation from our system.

For we cannot accept confusion – we need unity and fusion for our peace of mind and contentment – and this is why we look for the unific network in everything.

The wider and deeper is our internal network of knowledge, the greater is the possibility of relating and understanding new facts and observations. That is why it is said that traveling broadens one's mind. It expands our knowledge, thereby reducing possible future shock due to unrelatable or confusing new input. We are constantly striving to expand our unifying network of understanding. We are enslaved to the quest of the ultimate, unific oneness.

The Qur'an enjoins upon us to travel throughout the land, seeking knowledge by contemplating the example of those who lived before us. They too were subject to good and bad and the affliction of constant change. Although they may have built the most stable homes, their final abode is no longer what they had planned. In the Muslim world, one will still find the shrines of many saints and martyrs, rarely those of kings and rulers.

Language

It is curious to note how language allows individuals of different origins to relate, connect and unite with one another. It is through language that we find that although people differ in color or habits, they nevertheless resemble one another in the basic forces and powers that propel them to function. So language is a factor that takes apparent differences towards their root of basic sameness.

Another aspect of language is that it reflects the degree of evolvment and subtlety of a culture. Some languages are very pragmatically oriented, while others are not. Some accommodate conventional, human, existential requirements as well as the ability to communicate subtle and higher aspects which are not tangible or materially measurable.

Some languages are most suitable to communicate eternal or divinely revealed knowledge, such as Sanskrit, Aramaic or Arabic, while other languages, for example, are more adapted to

conveying objective, scientific or technological information. Although most languages can also communicate the subtler aspects, ultimately, they are limited in their ability fully to communicate revealed knowledge, and that is why poetry and other forms (drawing and painting) of expressing the sublime often need to be utilized.

Religions

The purpose of divinely revealed knowledge and the Prophetic message was to reveal to humanity the most dependable and unchanging set of laws and codes of conduct, which would be in harmony with the natural and universal laws and realities. The Prophetic revelations describe man's life on earth as a process of growth and increase in knowledge and awareness, in order to prepare him for the next phase of experience, which is the state following the death of the senses. This state can be attained in exceptional cases purposefully and voluntarily in this life or commonly and involuntarily after the death of the body.

One of the original purposes of religion is to enable human beings to discover and practice the immutable, unchanging laws operating in the universe, whose origins are non-physical and which can be neither violated nor ignored. Human life is basically noble, and the essence of our being is of a subtle dimension to which we invariably aspire in order to experience the benefits that can accrue to us individually and to society as a whole. By following these guidelines, we are necessarily motivated towards a high degree of morality, thereby bringing about a state echoing that of the 'Garden of Eden' here on earth.

Nature has given us the choice of following its laws, and if they are followed, all will be in harmony. If they are not followed, we will find our existence to be disturbing, confusing, and ultimately intolerable, and we will have only achieved that disharmony and disunity in our life which we inherently dislike and abhor. Nature is always guiding us to avoid the self-created hell which we frequently bring upon ourselves and from which we suffer on this planet.

It can be said that the fundamental aim of all religions is to assist humanity to bring about a 'Garden' environment in our lifetime which we long for inwardly, and to strive towards security,

safety, harmony and unity. That is the unified sublime state of the self which we are inherently programmed to attain.

The path of Islam (harmonious submission) was followed by all prophets and messengers throughout history. However, the laws of Islam as a code were completed by the Prophet Muhammad only fourteen hundred years ago. So all religions are in harmony and all prophets and messengers reflected the same truth and confirmed each other.

The Intended Destiny

As has been noted, humanity has a natural tendency to seek and understand ways that will lead to a lasting and harmonious state. The ultimate harmony comes about by the discovery of and adherence to the unchanging laws of nature, and by molding our own individual direction and orientation to fit within those laws. Only then can conflict disappear, and our desires and wishes move in harmony with the original and ultimate purpose of creation.

The same rule applies to societies and nations. If the will of the individual, and the collective will of society, unify in that creational stream of universal laws, what emerges is a healthy society and community. The healthy society and community, in turn, sustain healthy individuals and help to rehabilitate the weak and the infirm. Thus, on both the personal and collective levels, we are subject to a universal current of dynamic interactions which, in turn, are then controlled by the multitudinal visible and invisible laws of nature. Nature's ways and direction in the long run will overcome the individual or collective desires and objectives, if they are in conflict. So it is only rational for us to know the universal laws of natural reality and the ultimate purpose of creation, and to work along with them rather than oppose them. Only then will we begin to see our intended destiny and the perfection of these universal laws.

Law and justice

There are generally two sets of laws. The first is man-made and is based on convenience, prudence and expedience. When it is used to govern, it tends to be flexible and changeable, more often favoring the strong and the élite within the community, thus resulting in a basically unjust and oppressive system of governance. This set of laws is empirical, and is established according

to man's convenience, changing from time to time and reflecting the current state of the people and their social values, as well as being greatly influenced by socioeconomic factors.

The other set of laws is universal and does not change; it applies at all times. These laws have been revealed to humanity through the highly evolved and awakened prophets, messengers and gnostics, and are the body of laws which reflect and enhance the inherent values and virtues within us. These universal laws bring about lasting tranquility and stability – and therefore justice and natural harmony in existence. They relate to our behavior towards ourselves, towards other creatures and towards the source of all creation. Absolute justice is an attribute of the Creator, Allah, whose name is also al-`Adl, The Just.

The degree of success and durability of man-made laws, however, is related to how closely they approximate and reflect the universal laws. On many occasions we consciously attempt to reinforce the universal laws in our daily life, and it is often the difficulty of translating the universal laws into actual specifics in our individual situation in life that is at the root of much of the trouble. It stands to reason, therefore, to conclude that the best universally revealed doctrine is that which goes into specific detail, in order to enable us to apply the laws and the spirit behind them successfully.

Morality, Virtue and Divine Law

All social systems throughout history show us that there are common norms and moral values which are regarded as good, and others which are regarded as bad. At all times, we find forms of behavior which are considered acceptable and desirable and others which are not.

In most desirable and stable societies, as we have mentioned earlier, we find the higher virtues, such as courage, have always been held to be desirable traits, and the opposite, such as cowardice, have been considered undesirable.

Most of the basic virtues found in any one society tend to be very similar to those in other societies, and it is only their priority and the way those virtues are expressed that may differ. For example, in a society constantly facing external danger, we find that the virtue of courageous actions, physical strength and sacrifice are prized above all others, whereas in a society which is

stable and agrarian, we find such virtues as modesty, temperance and kindness to be regarded as the qualities most valued.

Therefore it is not the concept of virtue itself that is in question; rather, it is what a society considers to be virtuous that changes. In another example, a society may attach great value and merit to the act of political imprisonment at a time when that society is undergoing a struggle for independence and freedom. The same act at another time, when the society is stable and in the hands of its own people, would be regarded as political agitation, being both undesirable and disruptive.

In order to understand properly the full meaning of virtues we need to understand the universally revealed laws. It is the revealed laws which show us the proper application of those virtues which arise spontaneously and naturally in the heart. Morality and virtue spring from the heart, but the way of conduct and behavior must have its foundation in sound knowledge. The use of the intellect involves making choices and examining alternatives, and it is here that one finds that the prophetically revealed way is the optimum path and the most efficient means to achieving this objective.

We need to allow ourselves to be guided by the indications and proofs of the perfection of this prophetically revealed way in order to arrive at that which is already within us: the knowledge of right and wrong, and the morality inherent in our inner being.

The laws of the various revealed religious traditions have never contradicted one another. The laws and the message have always been the same. Rather, it was their emphasis and comprehensiveness which varied according to the extent of humanity's spiritual development and the state of its outer social form. When the ancient and slow-evolving Hindu spiritual teachings became increasingly ritualistic and socially oriented, Buddha arose with a teaching that strongly emphasized the development and awareness of the self and its psychology.

In a later age, the Prophet Jesus appeared at a time when the message of Moses had degenerated into a body of laws and regulations, crudely administered and abused by an élite group of religious custodians and through which the latter wielded great power over the masses. The

emphasis of the teachings of Jesus was on the inner purification of the self and the renewal of the spirit of the law, in order to redress the imbalance which had occurred due to the crude application of the letter of the law.

However, the basic meaning and intent behind the law remained, and remain, universal and for all time. There was never any disagreement about the essence of the revelations brought by the prophets. All that differed were the rituals and practices of outer behavior – whether, for example, the orientation for prayer would be towards Jerusalem, or Mecca, or elsewhere, or whether the day of rest should be on Saturday, Sunday or Friday. But there was never any disagreement that there should be a direction for prayer, or that one day out of the week would be set aside for rest and renewal.

True religious traditions are totally complementary to one another, in the sense that each succeeding religion added to and improved upon the previous one, until finally the basic code of conduct was completed and perfected for all humanity and for all time. It could be said that humanity had to evolve sufficiently in order to be able to adhere to the perfected and fully integrated body of revealed laws, by which we can conduct ourselves in life and arrive at a healthy inner and outer state, both individually and collectively. Without access to this divine code of conduct, we would be unable to progress successfully along the path of development and fulfillment. It is only through proper conduct that the moral values which are inherently pulsating within our heart will be able to manifest and bear fruit, in behavioral patterns which will in every circumstance offer us a safe and successful passage through this life.

Before we turn to our conception of the journey of the self, we need to establish an understanding of the basic nature and spectrum of the self. In the next chapter, we put forth a description of the self in all its aspects. For until the nature of the self is fully understood, there cannot be a proper understanding of individual or collective behavior.

Chapter 2: The Nature and Spectrum of the Self

Definition

In order to establish a clear foundation upon which we can develop our model of the self, we need first to define the ‘self’, *nafs*. The word *nafs* possesses many meanings and it may be defined as soul, or self, psyche, mind, spirit or life. It is also defined as a living creature, an animate being, essence, nature, inclination, appetite or desire, or personal identity. *Nafs* is derived from the root *nafasa*, whose root meanings include to be precious, valuable, or priceless, as well as, to compete or vie, to comfort or relieve, and to breathe, inhale and exhale. Other words derived from the same root mean a gem or precious thing (*nafisa*), a state of mind or mood (*nafsi*), mental attitude or disposition (*nafsiya*), breath, a swallow or gulp, and freedom or liberty (*nafas*), childbirth or delivery (*nifas*), psychology (*nafsaniya*); and the study of psychology is called ‘*ilm al-nafs*, the science of the self.

We shall define *nafs* as self or soul, which is non-physical, nor is it part of a body, nor is a physical body a necessary condition for its existence. The soul or self is that which breathes dynamism into physicality and gives it life.

The self manifests and evolves in this existence, in parallel with the growth and development of the body. Although it is not dependent upon the body for its existence, it exists and manifests in this life because of a body.

The nature of the self is indestructible and indivisible, and the fact that some part of us longs not to die echoes that immortal and eternal reality of the soul, or self. It emerged from non-time (pre-existence), lives in time, and returns to non-time (beyond physical existence).

The self has its origin in the realm of the unseen, and is primal and indestructible.

The self, or soul, then, is an essence which is immortal and non-physical, and which gives life to the physical body. It is influenced by the mind, will, intellect, heart and other cognitive processes.

The self unfolds and evolves in parallel with the growth and development of the human body, each moving towards its fullest potential. As the self moves towards growth of cognizance and awakening, the body moves towards physical maturity and, ultimately, decay and dissolution, back to the elements. Each therefore returns to its origin – the self, or soul, to its eternal non-time source in the unseen, and the body to the dust of the earth.

The self has been defined as ‘a subtle, ethereal essence which carries the power of life, the senses, and all voluntary movement and action’.¹ It is the essence that illumines and vitalizes the body. We could say that when the power or light of the self reaches all parts of the body, it is in full wakefulness. When the self disconnects with the outer or physical body but not with the inner, it is in a state of sleep, and when the self disconnects with both the outer body and the inner, it is called death. So sleep and death are of the same general nature, except that sleep involves partial disconnection and death involves total disconnection. We can liken the soul in relation to the body to that of light in relation to a lamp.

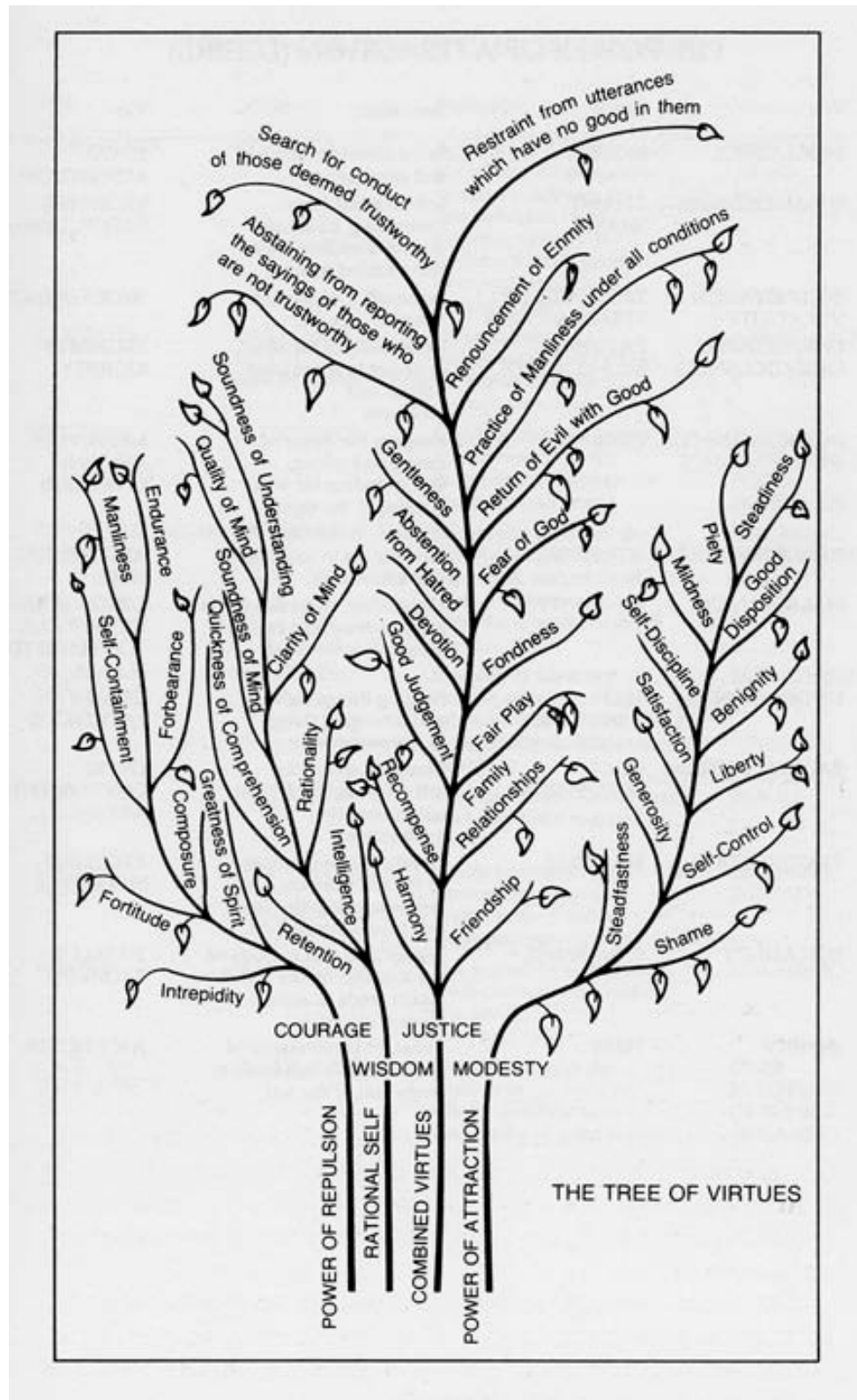
The *nafs* is also similarly defined² as that which is a body as far as its present existence is concerned, and a spirit (*ruh*) as far as its immortality is concerned. So the self comes into existence with the body, which is destructible, but its continuation after death is with the spirit (*ruh*), which is indestructible. It is stated in the Qur’an that ‘the soul is one of the commands of [the] Lord’ (17:85) and by this is meant that the soul has its origin not in earthly existence but in the eternal realm of the unseen.

The broadest usage of the word *nafs* in Islamic literature refers to the soul or spirit of the human being. In the writings of the Sufi masters, and in particular the treatises on self-knowledge and purification, the term was usually meant to indicate our lower nature and its baser impulses, as in the phrase, ‘The continuing strife between man and his *nafs*’. The word *nafs* is frequently translated in such literature as the carnal soul which must be restrained and made patient.

¹ Sayyid Sharif al-Jurjani, the fourteenth-century Persian theologian and gnostic.

² Sadr al-Din Muhammad al-Shirazi, widely known as Mulla Sadra, the sixteenth-century Persian gnostic and theosopher.

Appendix I – Tree of Virtues



Appendix II – Table 1

THE POWER OF ATTRACTION (DESIRE)			
Vice	Virtue	Definition	Vice
INDULGENCE	MODESTY	Self-restraint in conduct and expression.	TOTAL ABSTENTION
SHAMELESSNESS	CHASTITY/ SHAME	Self-restraint from committing misdeeds, thereby avoiding blame and justified insults.	EXCESSIVE BASHFULNESS
INCONSTANCY/ VOLATILITY	TRANQUILLITY/ STEADFASTNESS	Tranquillity of the self when desires arise.	INDIFFERENCE
UNRESTRAINT/ LICENTIOUSNESS	PATIENCE/ SELF-CONTROL	Restraining of the self, so as not to chase after desires and pleasures.	EXCESSIVE RIGIDITY
INDISCRIMINATE/ EXTRAVAGANCE	LIBERALITY	Keeping the mean in giving and taking, and spending for what is right, in the right amount, in the right manner.	MEANNESS/ DENYING ONE'S DUE
IMMODERATION	SOBRIETY	Moderation in food, drink and adornment.	ABSTEMIOUS- NESS
MALIGNANCY	BENIGNITY	Disposition towards what is praiseworthy and zeal to accomplish the good.	OBSEQUIOUS- NESS/TRYING TOO HARD TO PLEASE
UNDISCIPLINED	SELF- DISCIPLINE	Judging things rightly and arranging things in the proper way.	OVERLY FASTIDIOUS
BAD DISPOSITION	GOOD DISPOSITION	Complementing the self with beautiful adornment (in moderation).	OVERLY COMPLIMENT- ARY
PERTURBATION	MILDNESS	Quietude which comes to the self from an innate aptitude that is free from perturbation.	EXCESSIVE MEEKNESS
INSTABILITY	STEADINESS	Tranquillity and stability of the soul during the agitation which tends to arise in the pursuit of desires.	TOTALLY PASSIVE
IMPIETY	PIETY	Constant performance of good deeds which leads to perfection of the self.	ASCETICISM

Appendix III – Table 2

THE POWER OF REPULSION (ANGER)			
Vice	Virtue	Definition	Vice
COWARDICE	COURAGE	Applying good judgement in confronting dangerous situations: namely, that one should not fear alarming things if to perform them is good or to withstand them is commendable.	RECKLESS-NESS/ FOLLY
PETTINESS	GREATNESS OF SPIRIT/ MAGNANIMITY	Preparedness for significant or great affairs, yet minimising them in one's own eyes.	ARROGANCE
DESPAIR	INTREPIDITY	Confidence in the face of fearful events, to the extent that no despair can overwhelm one.	OVER CONFIDENCE/ FOOL- HARDINESS
DISHEVELMENT	COMPOSURE	The means by which the self can endure calmly happiness, sadness and other afflictions, even the moment of death itself.	UNCARING/ INDIFFERENCE
OVERLY SUBMISSIVE	FORTITUDE	Courage in adversity, and the strength of the self to bear pain and to resist it, especially in dangerous situations.	MASOCHISM
QUICK TO ANGER	FORBEARANCE	To remain tranquil and keep from becoming angered easily.	DOCILE
UNDISCI- PLINED	SELF-CONTROL/ SELF- CONTAINMENT	Ability to restrain from movement or action in moments of serious consequences.	EXCESSIVE RIGIDITY
APATHY	MANLINESS	The aspiration to perform great deeds in expectation of a goodly outcome.	MACHISMO
LACK OF ENDURANCE	ENDURANCE	The ability to use the faculties of the body for what is good through discipline and good habits.	OVER EXTENSION OF BODILY ORGANS

Appendix IV – Table 3

THE RATIONAL SELF			
Vice	Virtue	Definition	Vice
STUPIDITY (i.e., deliberate suppression of wisdom)	WISDOM	The knowledge of things divine and human, which gives discrimination to which of possible actions should be performed and which should be avoided	IMPUDENCE (i.e., use of rational faculty for wrong ends)
DULLNESS	INTELLIGENCE	The quick flaring of conclusions and the soul's easy understanding of them.	CUNNING
FORGETFULNESS (neglecting what should be remembered)	RETENTION	The persistence of the images of what is derived by the mind or the imagination.	ATTENTIVENESS (to what should not be remembered)
IMBECILITY (failure to consider an object sufficiently for what it is)	RATIONALITY	The conformity of a sound investigation of objects to what they are.	FRIVOLITY (going too far in consideration, until one is led beyond what it is)
SLOWNESS OF DEDUCTION	CLARITY OF UNDERSTANDING	The readiness of the self to deduce what is required.	MENTAL FLASHES (which prevent deducing what is required)
DEFICIENT CONTEMPLATION (which falls short of the necessary consequence)	EXCELLENCE & STRENGTH OF UNDERSTANDING	Contemplation of what follows from the antecedent.	EXCESSIVE CONTEMPLATION (which leads away from it to something else)
FINDING LEARNING TOO DIFFICULT	CAPACITY FOR LEARNING	The strength of the mind and sharpness of understanding by which theoretical matters are apprehended.	LEARNING WITH SUCH EASE (that it does not remain fixed in the mind)

Appendix V – Table 4

THE COMBINED VIRTUES		
Vice	Virtue	Definition
INJUSTICE	JUSTICE	When the three virtues of Wisdom, Courage & Modesty combine in moderation one with another, they result in the highest virtue of all, which is Justice.
ENMITY	FRIENDSHIP	Sincere love which causes one to take interest in all that concerns one's friends and to choose to do all the good that one can for them.
DISHARMONY	HARMONY	The agreement of opinions and beliefs brought about by close contact leading to cooperation in the daily affairs of life.
LACK OF KINSHIP	FAMILY FELLOWSHIP	Sharing the goods of this world with one's relations.
NON-ACKNOWLEDGEMENT TO OTHERS	RECOMPENSE	Repayment of a charitable gift, with its equivalent or more.
FOUL PLAY	FAIR PLAY	To give and take in business equitably, with fairness and according to the interests of all concerned.
DISHONEST TRANSACTION	HONEST DEALING	To recompense without regret or reminding others of favours done to them.
ESTRANGEMENT	AMICABILITY	The desire to win the affections of the deserving and the virtuous with a pleasing disposition and performance of deeds which inspire such affection.
INFIDELITY	PIETY	In honour, glorification and obedience of God in revering His favourite ones: the angels, the Prophets, the Imams (Masters of the Prophetic House) and following the commands of the Law.

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11. Ibn `Arabi, Muhyiddin; or al-Arabi, sixteenth-century theologian and mystic of Andalusia, Spain.
12. Ibn Sina; known as Avicenna in the West, lived in the eleventh century in Bokhara (in present day Russia).

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